

Ben Horton Battlefield soldier today

WOii Ben Horton Battlefield soldier today and yesterday. Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen. This Morning I have been asked to talk about the Soldier and in particular, the Cavalryman, on the modern battlefield. At first glance, the modern soldier and those that have gone and fought before us, are poles apart. We dress differently, speak differently and have been brought up in the computer age. But the more I think about it, it really is a case of the more things change, the more they stay the same. This really became apparent to me after re-reading “To the Green Fields of Kastina”, written by Susan’s father, SGT Stafford. The daily entries detailing goings on in both Australia and overseas highlight some of the same challenges that soldiers in training and on operations deal with today. The 2nd Cavalry Regiment has now been continuously on, or preparing for overseas operations for 13 Years. Serving in East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan and seeing action in all theatres. The Jungles of East Timor where the Regiment served from 1999-2003 proved to provide the same Jungle Operations difficulties that faced the 2nd/6th in New Guinea in 1944-45. Iraq 2003 - 2009, Afghanistan 2006 to the present day sees the regiment once again operating in the desert environment. Like Syria and Egypt, both environments are harsh on men and equipment. In “To The Green Fields of Kastina”, SGT Stafford often talks about maintenance of the vehicles. To Cavalrymen of all generations, our vehicle maintenance and preparation are just as important as our weapons. And we still live by the mantra of “Watering the Horse before ourselves”. The technology of vehicles and weapons have changed significantly over the last 100 years, however once again this has been the case for all soldiers in every major action since 1914. The Great War of 1914-1918 was significantly influenced by technological advances in the Machine Gun and the invention of the Tank. The 10th Light Horse fought hard at the Nek, and the 4th and the 12th Light Horse Regiment carried out the last great Cavalry Charge at Beersheba. World War 2 saw continued development of Armoured Vehicles and a greater use of aircraft. 1945 also saw the first use of Nuclear weapons, ending the Pacific Campaign. We saw the 2/6th as an excellent example of the modern Cavalry, fighting in multiple theatres, extreme terrain and both mounted and dismounted. Korea and Vietnam saw the emergence of the helicopter. Once again Cavalry fought at Long Tan, Binh Ba and the defences of Fire Support Base Coral and Balmoral. Iraq and Afghanistan has seen the use of the modern Armoured Vehicle, Satellite communications and GPS. The Second Cavalry Regiment, once again demonstrated the Cavalry’s adaptability and austerity in a rugged and complex environment. So in every conflict in the last 100 Years, the Australian Cavalryman has had to adapt to developing technology in harsh environments. But not everything is the same. The enemy that we face on the modern battlefield has adapted just as quickly as we have; he continues to evolve his techniques in line with our technology. Fighting an insurgency where the enemy blends in with the local population, coupled with the 24 hour news cycle, presents the modern soldier with a set of problems that has never really been encountered until now. The decisions and actions of young men in combat can be watched and judged by those of us without any context on television screens within the same day, leading to the term strategic CPL being coined. So, while some things have changed, the one constant is the soldier himself. If you take away the different uniform and different weapon being carried he still has the sense of humour, he displays ingenuity, (for both good and bad endeavours) and is immensely proud of those who have gone before him. But for me, it is his constant readiness to be called upon to leave loved ones behind and carries out tasks across the full spectrum. From assisting in natural disaster cleanup, peacemaking and peacekeeping operations, mentoring local forces or fighting a lethal enemy, the Australian Cavalryman has remained ready. In my current position as the WSM of Binh Ba Troop I have a hand in the training of the Corps newest Cavalrymen and I can assure everyone that the Regiments future is in safe hands. In closing, I would like to share a couple of paragraphs from a Banjo Patterson Poem called “We’re All Australians Now”

“The mettle that a race can show
Is proved with shot and steel,
And now we know what nations know
And feel what nations feel.

The honoured graves beneath the crest
Of Gaba Tepe hill
May hold our bravest and our best,
But we have brave men still.”